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A Novelist's Contention: Moscow Sways De Gaulle

By Fred Farris

Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30.—Author Leon Uris, whose new novel "Topaz" concerns Soviet espionage penetration of the French government, said today that events in recent weeks bore out the contention that Moscow was helping shape French government policy.

"General de Gaulle is getting some pretty bad information from those around him," the American writer said in a telephone interview.

"His personal passions are being distorted and played upon. The Communists are using him as an instrument, playing on his violent Anglo-American phobia."

Mr. Uris, speaking from his home in Aspen, Colo., said he had been reliably informed that a known French Communist—a Canada-based diplomat—was briefing Gen. de Gaulle during his controversial visit to Quebec. The French leader's praise of

Quebec separatists created sharp frictions between Paris and the Canadian government.

Mr. Uris, whose best-selling novels include "Exodus" and "Battle Cry," also said that Gen. de Gaulle's pro-Arab, anti-Israeli stand on the six-day war in June caused him to believe the French leader's thinking was shaped by pro-Soviet influences.

[An effort to reach the French Foreign Ministry's official spokesman for comment as soon as Mr. Uris's observations were known here was unsuccessful.]

Neither the State Department nor the Central Intelligence Agency would comment on the explosive allegations contained in Mr. Uris's book.

But administration sources said that the U.S. intelligence services are reluctant to enter "into too close relations" with French intelligence because of the large number of Communists in France. This feeling, it



Leon Uris

was said, was shared by many other Western nations' intelligence services.

The new novel is scheduled for October publication by McGraw Hill but is now being serialized by "Look" magazine. The title is the code name assigned in the novel to a Soviet-directed network of Frenchmen in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the De Gaulle government who, according to the book, have not only passed alliance military secrets to Moscow but subtly maneuvered French policy.

The author said: "I am not making any accusations about anybody in the French government or the French Secret Service." And many of the names assigned principal characters—such as the president of France, "Gen. Pierre la Croix"—are fictionalized.

But Mr. Uris added that "to the best of my knowledge" from informed sources the following points described in the novel are authentic:

○ France was preparing in 1963 a highly secret military-industrial espionage operation, using French exchange scientists in America, against the United States. Moscow intended to use this network in its own interests.

○ Moscow-directed Frenchmen ("Topaz") were in strategic posts in NATO, the French Secret Service and in the government.

In the novel, a character modeled on President Kennedy writes a letter to the French president warning him of the

existence of Topaz. The United States has learned of the Soviet-French operations through a Russian intelligence official who defected to the United States.

The warning is rejected by President la Croix after he orders his own allegedly subverted secret service to investigate and receives its report that it was a Soviet-American hoax.

(Informed but unofficial American sources confirmed the existence of a Soviet defector to the United States who answers the description of the informer in the novel.)

The book also describes a subsection of the "Secret Operations" group under the French Secret Service (SDECE). This subgroup allegedly uses French underworld figures to carry out kidnappings, beatings and killings.

Mr. Uris said the Ben Barka affair—the disappearance of Moroccan opposition leader Mehdi Ben Barka at the hands of Moroccan and French cloak-and-dagger agents—showed that "the French Secret Service is pretty shaky."

In the novel, the Soviet defector explains that, because "breaking the NATO shield has top priority" in Moscow, his mission as head of anti-NATO operations was to "find the weak link" in the alliance. "It is France," he tells the French intelligence officer. "Here is where we have concentrated our efforts."

France Is 'Weak Link'

Mr. Uris's novel traces Soviet influence in the post-World War II French government from a Communist offer to accept La Croix's authority as leader of France in exchange for Communist representation on "any national committees," equal treatment for Communists in the resistance movement, and

an end to French persecution of Communists.

In the novel, La Croix's acceptance of this deal was spurred by the cavalier treatment given the French hero by American and British wartime leaders. The novel portrays Gen. La Croix as a vain, proud, self-assured leader who is confident he can control the Communists to his own advantage. It appears to suggest his later refusal to believe that his government was riddled with Communist agents stems from this confidence.

Mr. Uris is aware his novel will outrage many Frenchmen—both in and out of government. He is convinced, however, that—aside from the fictionalizing of some personalities and encounters—his book represents authentic recent history.

"Look" magazine said in a foreword to the first installment of the novel that it was departing from "its long-established policy of publishing only non-fiction" because, while fiction, many of the book's incidents "are based upon fact."

While a Dutch and German translation of "Topaz" are in preparation for autumn publication, efforts to find a French publisher so far have been unsuccessful.

Mr. Uris, noting this, said: "In the event that freedom of the press is not honored in France now, I would suggest that American tourists to France take a copy with them and leave it there."

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